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The development and utilisation of a Website “tilgjengelighet.no” to improve public and decision makers knowledge of accessibility within physical design of an area or building.

Rogaland County Council, Norway
Linda Nilsen Ask

There is a political consensus in Rogaland that the county council shall actively promote and participate in efforts to create a more accessible and inclusive society.

Rogaland county council spends a significant amount on new investments and operations each year and delivers services within the fields of education, transport and culture. It is also involved in development and cooperation within a range of other regional policy areas.

The council requires that there is accessibility for all users in the services which the council provides and has responsibility for.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. County planning is used to ensure that regional efforts are coordinated.

The county plan for universal design has guidelines for both state and municipal planning and operations. It is an ambitious plan. It is the result of cooperation between private stakeholders and public agencies. We face major challenges but we expect that continued cooperation and intensified efforts will ensure that planning delivers tangible results (Rogaland County Council, 2014).

The county plan has been an important tool in the effort to ensure that everyone has good opportunities to engage in activity and for personal development in Rogaland

Background for the plan

The mandate for the preparation of the county plan for universal design was originally included in the Rogaland county plan for 2006 - 2009, in which universal design is highlighted as an overriding principle for all planning and development in the county. This applies to several policy areas including development of the public transport system, cultural buildings, in education, for sports and recreation areas and for cultural heritage amenities..

One of the main regional goals with regard to quality of life is therefore that it should be "Equal living conditions for all, at all stages of life". Two of the strategies to achieve this are:

- "To ensure that universal design is incorporated into all government planning and in the design of public and private services, products and the built environment, ensuring accessible design for all users.
- Prepare a county plan for universal design. "

The purpose of universal design is to increase people's opportunities to participate in society through the design of products, services, means of communication, buildings and built-up spaces that are accessible to as many as possible. The term universal refers to the entire population. We will all at some time in life suffer from disabilities; be they temporary or more long-term. Disability is yet another aspect of the diversity of mankind. By applying universal design, we attempt to create general solutions that cater to as many as possible, while avoiding the need to implement special solutions for various groups. The term is not limited to building design, but is equally important in sectors such as education, information, design, etc. (Rogaland County Council, 2014)

“Universal design is the design of products and surroundings in a manner that ensures they can be used by everyone, to the extent possible, without the need for adaption or special design.” (The Norwegian Ministry of the Climate and Environment, 2007).

The work on universal design has both an international and national foundation including:

- UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- The European Union Disability Strategy 2010-2020
- Official Norwegian report.
- Laws / Regulations
- Government's Action Plan for Universal Design
- Regional and municipal plans

The County plan

County plans may be developed for specific policy areas, or geographic regions within a county. These plans shall include objectives and guidelines for development in areas where there is the need for coordination that goes beyond the individual municipality. It is a prerequisite that County plans are produced in collaboration with the relevant municipalities, government agencies and other stakeholders.

The County Plan sets the framework for municipal and state planning and serves to define the county authority's commitment in its work. The principle of sector responsibility forms the basis for the follow-up of the plan, meaning that each individual public body is responsible for universal design within its field of responsibility and expertise. This emphasises the importance of interagency efforts in the field of universal design.

County Plan for Universal Design

The revised County Plan for Universal Design is based on the original plan from 2007 with the aim of raising universal design issues higher on the agenda. A main objective of the work is to raise quality of life in the region, including "Equal living conditions for all, in all stages of life". The plan, which is an update of the original plan with some minor changes, has the following focus areas:

1. Knowledge and expertise
2. Building and construction
3. Outdoor areas, outdoor recreation and cultural heritage sites
4. Information and communication technology
5. Transport
6. Innovation, business, industry and tourism

The County Plan for Universal Design states as its main objective:

"Universal design will form the basis for all public planning and design of public and private services, products and surroundings, and will result in one design for all users"

Rogaland County Council is progressing well in its work with universal design, but achieving the objectives set out in the county plan will require substantial efforts to succeed. The universal design measures taken so far have to a large extent followed up the County Plan for Universal Design, taking its cue from the plan's six focus areas and from a pilot project. The County Council are developing expertise and competence, thereby contributing knowledge and understanding of the implications of universal design for the individual, for the municipalities and other stakeholders, and is also implementing measures to improve people's access to their physical surroundings.

Universal Design Work in Rogaland in a National Context

The County Plan for Universal Design was passed unanimously by the County Council in 2007, followed by the approval of the Ministry of the Climate and Environment the same year. Rogaland County Council was awarded the 2007 Budstikka Award by the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion for "the comprehensive manner in which the County Plan for Universal Design highlighted key contributing areas for making the county accessible to all."

The County Council also adopted a motion "to present an application for Rogaland to be given status as a pioneer county for universal design". This motion formed the basis for Rogaland County Council's application to become a pilot county upon the invitation of the Ministry of Climate and Environment in January 2009.

Rogaland County Council was selected to become one of eight pilot counties in Norway in May 2009, in accordance with the Government's 2009-2013 Action Plan for Universal Design. This action plan would form the basis for the development of universal design as a strategy in all municipal and county planning and management.

From 2009 to 2013, eleven of the county's 26 municipalities participated as pilots for all or parts of the period (The Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2013), and Rogaland was the county with the highest participation rate in this national project. The Ministry of Climate and Environment has gathered outstanding examples from the K1 Project in a report, and 5 of the 37 selected examples are from Rogaland.

The council has a focus on the area of "Knowledge and skills " with the following objective: " There shall be access to courses on universal design geared towards different disciplines in Rogaland ". The council has developed educational programs for secondary schools and colleges. The principals of all public high schools report annually on whether they have taught in universal design. The council holds courses in universal design for newly elected councillors, and in addition to regional meetings and conferences also holds specific courses in mapping methods developed in conjunction with the development of the website [tilgjengelighet.no](http://www.tilgjengelighet.no).

The website www.tilgjengelighet.no

This is a website and an information channel for the general public about accessibility to various locations in the county. It also serves as a marketing channel through which the county council can issue information about universal design measures.

The county initiative "City of Culture for All" was inspired by the cities of Stavanger and Sandnes being awarded joint status as 2008 European Capital of Culture.

The project's objective was to study the venues of the Capital of Culture events and to what extent they were accessible to all, based on universal design principles. The results were published on www.tilgjengelighet.no, ("tilgjengelighet" means accessibility in Norwegian). The user organisations were quick to hail this as a long-awaited initiative and reported that the need for such a website was substantial.

In addition to cultural venues, the website also covers tourism (hotels, restaurants, attractions, cultural heritage sites and outdoor recreation areas), public buildings, secondary schools, sports venues and different types of outdoor areas. The website is also available in an English version.

In order to achieve the aims in Rogaland County Council's regional plan for universal design, it was necessary to develop a "tailor made" methodology for the grading of the different kind of destinations. The methodology was developed in close cooperation with authorities and is built on the national standard known as "TEK-10" (Lovdata, 2010). Representatives for the organizations for people with disabilities have supplied valuable knowledge and information in developing the methodology.

The surveys have been based on the methodology and done by occupational therapists and staff with formal education in outdoor recreation. The work has been done in close cooperation with staff from the municipalities and representatives of the organizations for people with disabilities.

The county council has had a partnership with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) since 2012 whereby a representative from a user group is employed in a project position to make surveys of the built environment. The locations are surveyed in most instances with a representative from the location itself. This gives them an insight into the process, judgements made and conditions of their location as regards accessibility. Simple deficiencies which are identified tend to be rectified immediately. This type of knowledge transfer is very valuable.

Once the physical parameters of an area are registered, it is then given a score within each of the five disability categories. This determines whether or not an area will be approved in this category. Information about these areas is then posted on the website where users can see which areas are suitable for their individual needs. It also gives planners an overview over areas within their region that requires improvement.

The county administration issues reports on deviations from the Universal Design Requirements from the registrations, and has sent out reports to dental clinics, secondary schools, cultural buildings, municipal administration buildings and hotels. The reports show where in the checklist there are registered deviations from the requirements for universal design. These points are mainly founded in the building regulations. If 80% or more of the questions within a category in the checklist receive a positive response, this will be marked by giving the symbol a colour. This colour indicates that the place has achieved the status of being universally designed in relation to the given requirements.

The county administration's aim is that the reports will assist in the further efforts to make these places accessible to all and recommend that the reports will be used as a basis for corrections.

It is also possible to take out statistics from the website. This along with the reports provide the basis for developing measures to upgrade buildings, facilities and outdoor areas, and are useful tools for decision makers.

We have also developed an API (application programming interface) to integrate our data with data from other sources. This will allow other developers to use our information in their own applications. And our information can be combined with information about public transport, various mapping websites or any other information designed for smartphones or computers (tilgjengelighet.no, 2018).

The county council in Rogaland has adopted this mapping method when remediating county buildings in terms of universal design. This is mainly in secondary schools and dental clinics. The form is used both to identify shortcomings in relation to universal design and as a basis for the design and drafting of specific construction drawings. This form is also included in the specifications in tender proposals for county buildings.

The filmmaker Mark Flagler made two films on behalf of Rogaland county in connection with the county's marking of 2015 as the year for outdoor recreation. The purpose of the films is to encourage recreation and physical activity and to inform municipalities and others who work with accessibility about the work done on mapping universal design.

The films will help to make many more people aware of the website www.tilgjengelighet.no. One film shows a selection of activity opportunities in outdoor recreation areas in Rogaland, while the other illustrates the surveying methods and tools used in the mapping through animation. The films last about 3-4 minutes each and have both a Norwegian and an English version. See them at this [link](#).

Many user groups and local public officials have a vision that the website can be used at a national level. Several counties and other agencies have expressed interest in cooperating on further development of the website.

Rogaland County Council has used this website as a tool for achieving universal design goals. The website is not tied up to a particular registration method, and it is possible to retrieve historical information to see what action is taken at what time. The database makes it possible to develop universal design indicators, and it is a useful tool for decision makers to set targeted measures to reach the goal of an accessible society.

The National Conference of the County Boards for Disabled People made in 2017 a resolution urging the state to take over the operation and further development of the website so that the rest of Norway had the opportunity to make use of it (Landskonferanse for fylkesråd for funksjonshemmede, 2017). The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs responded that they did not want to take over the website as they are uncertain if the interest is large enough for the website in terms of the cost perspective. Therefore, in the months to come, we will provide other county councils and municipalities the opportunity to connect to the website.

Demographic forecasts show that the age group 67+ will have increased by 80% by 2030 in Rogaland County. This is a strong reminder of the importance of prioritising ongoing awareness and potential solutions to accessibility within everyday life. Each and every one of us wishes to stay in control of our own lives, participating actively within our societies. In order to achieve this, we must develop an inclusive society together, applying a long-term perspective. This responsibility rests equally with the public and private sectors.

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